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39th plenary meeting
Wednesday, 2 November 2016, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Thomson ..... (Fiji)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 13 (*continued*)

Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields

Plenary meeting to discuss action-oriented recommendations to address the socioeconomic and environmental impacts of the 2015/16 El Niño phenomenon

The President: Since the General Assembly adopted resolution 70/110, on the global impacts of the 2015/16 El Niño phenomenon last December, the lives of over 60 million people across our world have suffered the devastating impact of El Niño. Extreme droughts across Southern Africa have caused massive crop failures, leaving millions of people without enough food. Catastrophic hurricanes have moved across the Caribbean, devastating tropical cyclones have battered the Pacific and South-East Asia, and, in Ecuador, widespread flooding and landslides have struck communities.

The El Niño phenomenon has severely disrupted global rainfall patterns, leading to both disastrous flooding and prolonged droughts. The compounding effects of climate change and El Niño have seen an increase in the intensity, frequency and variability of extreme weather events, hitting those countries least responsible for climate change first and hardest. It is predicted that these extreme weather events will worsen in future.

The humanitarian impacts of El Niño have been profound, creating massive need across our world, increasing food insecurity and malnutrition, exacerbating outbreaks of infectious respiratory and waterborne diseases, disrupting health and education services, upending livelihoods and forcibly displacing people and communities. Meanwhile, the prospects for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in countries affected by the El Niño phenomenon are being undermined.

Urgent action is required. Comprehensive, long-term strategies are needed to build early-warning systems, to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable countries, and to prevent, mitigate and repair the adverse socioeconomic and environmental impacts. Humanitarian responses need to be scaled up with financial, technical and capacity-building support provided to countries and people in need. Greater collaboration and information exchange is required, including through the collection and sharing of timely and accurate data between relevant institutions and networks.

Importantly, global awareness and an understanding of El Niño and climate change are also essential. To this end, I commend the Secretary-General for his prescient decision earlier this year to appoint the former President of Ireland, Mrs. Mary Robinson, and the Permanent Representative of Kenya, Mr. Macharia Kamau, as his Special Envoys for El Niño and Climate, and to give them the task of bringing the message to the world.

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The Special Envoys are already having an impact, travelling to El Niño-affected communities in Ethiopia, Mozambique, Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste in order to understand and raise awareness of challenges and priorities.

As has been said, more than 60 million people around our world are affected by severe El Niño-linked weather events. As a recurring global phenomenon, rather than a one-off event, addressing the impacts of El Niño requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach. Implementing the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change are all critical to these efforts.

Let us therefore commit ourselves to implementing urgently, effectively and at scale these global agreements and to addressing the socioeconomic and environmental effects of the El Niño phenomenon.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): Due to its geographical location and the characteristics of its territory, Peru is highly vulnerable to natural disasters whose impacts can affect the lives, development and livelihoods of our citizens, in particular the poorest. That is why Peru has a State policy for disaster-risk management as part of our development agenda. Within the framework of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, clear global targets and practical measures for action are set out, thereby highlighting the cross-cutting nature of disaster risk management as an essential component of sustainable development.

The 2015/16 El Niño phenomenon was the strongest since 1997. Thanks to the concerted efforts of the World Meteorological Organization and national and regional climate centres, it has been possible to carry out preventive actions that greatly mitigate the negative effects of this phenomenon. In Peru, the cost of the preventive measures adopted by our Central Government is estimated to be $505 million. Those measures enabled us avoid losses of $3.5 billion, which is equivalent to 0.2 per cent of Peru's gross domestic product. The total losses during the 1982-1983 and 1997-1998 events amounted to $3.283 billion and $3.5 billion, respectively. Those figures are equivalent to 11.6 per cent and 6.2 per cent of the gross domestic product in their respective years. In both cases, the productive sectors, such as agriculture, fisheries and livestock, were the most affected. During the 2015/16 El Niño phenomenon, the agricultural sector and its fields were insured through a farming insurance plan that covered more than 550,000 hectares of crops in eight extremely poor regions in rural areas. Similarly, under the plan, 525,000 head of cattle were covered, and 15,000 hectares of grass were planted to feed some 265,200 animals.

We would like to share some of the lessons learned from the recent El Niño phenomenon with a view to ensuring that our risk- and disaster-management policy reach all our people. Significant efforts are required to ensure the implementation of the Sendai Framework and thereby achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. The main lessons learned in Peru in relation to the 2015/16 El Niño phenomenon are the following.

Close cooperation between the Government and the population is needed. To avoid further damage, multisectoral action should be taken at all levels of Government. The implementation of disaster-risk-management policies are necessary so that appropriate action may be taken. A monitoring system for detecting quarantine pests must be maintained. Joint cooperation with neighbouring countries, such as our cooperation with Ecuador, is essential. Adequate safety measures and productive infrastructure near riverbeds should be set up to prevent overflows during periods of El Niño. Micro-reservoirs should be maintained to ensure that water is available for agriculture and livestock during droughts. Improving the accuracy of early-warning systems with respect to reach, notification and awareness-raising of vulnerable populations is key. To maximize resources, coordination with local authorities is crucial. These are just some of the main lessons learned by Peru in dealing with the El Niño phenomenon.

We also welcome the United Nations efforts to address these challenges, such as the recent appointment of the Special Envoys of the Secretary-General on El Niño and Climate last May. Moreover, there has been an increase in international cooperation for developing countries to complement the measures taken at the national level to implement the Sendai Framework and, in the broader context, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Mr. Cadena (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): The most recent report of the World Meteorological Organization on the El Niño phenomenon confirms that, in May

2016, we reached the end of the peak period for El Niño 2015/16. El Niño affected more than 60 million people and their livelihoods and had an economic impact that even now is difficult to measure. Individuals and families who depend on agriculture, fisheries and livestock were particularly affected. The weather forecasts show a high probability of a weakening of La Niña in 2016 and almost no chance of a significant episode of El Niño during 2016 and 2017.

In our region of Central America, countries and towns were particularly affected by one of the most serious droughts in the region's history. In general, there were serious effects on harvest crop volumes and road infrastructure, which led to substantial losses in crops and livestock, affecting food security throughout the region.

The Government of Ecuador addressed and reduced the adverse effects of the El Niño phenomenon 2015/16 by designing, implementing and launching six multipurpose projects over nine years through public investment, amounting to more than $1.1 billion, in order to protect citizens and their livelihoods from winter floods by means of creating reservoirs to ensure that water is available for drinking, irrigation and renewable energies. More than 142,000 hectares of crops have been protected. The ongoing implementation of public programmes for the control of insect-borne diseases, such as zika, dengue and chikungunya, along with the maintenance and regular cleaning of drainage canals, has visibly reduced the impact on our population.

It is worth noting that the Government of Ecuador has undertaken several actions in coordination with local governments, civil society and communities to strengthen the State's capacity to respond to natural disasters, always through an inclusive risk-management approach and by using an innovative georeferencing process for people with disabilities in areas of influence, in order to identify persons with disabilities and develop a family emergency plan that ensures timely attention to a possible emergency due to the adverse effects of the phenomenon. We believe that these early actions allowed us to ensure the safety of thousands of individuals and their livelihoods and represented a savings of more than $300 million in 2015-2016 by protecting cultivated land, crops, livestock and infrastructure, inter alia. We stress, however, that the effects of the devastating earthquake with a magnitude of 6.8 on the Richter scale that hit several regions in our country on 16 April 2016 exacerbated the challenges for the Government and in particular for the coastal population of my country.

Ecuador recognizes the importance of humanitarian assistance for countries that were among the most affected by El Niño phenomenon in 2015/16, and we believe the time has come to look beyond the mere humanitarian consideration of the effects of the phenomenon and undertake early activities for strengthening institutional capacities in the affected countries in order to respond adequately and in a timely manner to these effects. Ecuador thanks the Secretary-General for his report on the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (A/71/230), which includes a section on measures to address the socioeconomic and environmental effects of El Niño, and welcomes the appointment of Mrs. Mary Robinson and Mr. Macharia Kamau as Special Envoys on El Niño and Climate. We commend the Economic and Social Council for organizing the high-level event on this issue on 6 May 2016.

The relevance of this issue demands an ongoing discussion on the progress achieved at the global level. Ecuador believes that tackling the adverse effects of natural events that develop gradually constitutes an appropriate situation for the agencies responsible for promoting development to coordinate activities in order to provide comprehensive action-oriented recommendations and solid proposals that incorporate elements of science, technology, innovation and resilient infrastructure for the countries most affected in a timely manner and while continuing and increasing the necessary humanitarian assistance efforts. The Ecuador urges the relevant entities to be proactive, act holistically and take early action, and not just react to the challenge of El Niño. To that end, Ecuador appreciates the attention paid by Member States and notes with interest their action-oriented statements and recommendations.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in this plenary meeting to discuss action-oriented recommendations to address the socioeconomic and environmental impacts of the 2015/16 El Niño phenomenon.

The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 13.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.